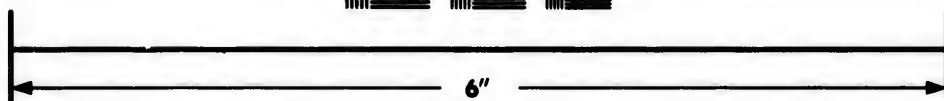
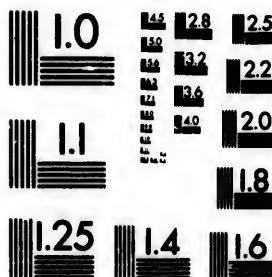


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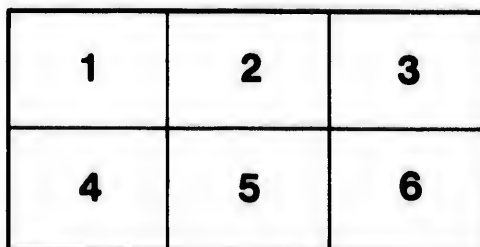
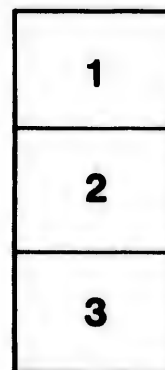
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AN ESSAY

ON

PAROCHIAL VISITING.

*Read before the Home District Clerical Association,
March 19th, 1861, by the Rev. W. S. Darling,
assistant Minister of the Holy Trinity Church,
Toronto, and published by request.*

No conscientious parish priest can fail to be deeply conscious of the great necessity and importance of the regular and systematic visitation of his parishioners. Apart from all considerations of profit to himself and the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer, he is bound to fulfil this part of his duty, if he would deliver his own soul from blood guiltiness, and if he would be instrumental in delivering the souls of others from the power and penalty of sin. It may be safely said that no clergyman, however able and exemplary in his other ministrations, ever exerted that influence for good over his flock, to which he might legitimately have laid claim, who habitually fails to discharge this part of his duty. And while as an individual he thus loses power over the individual members of his flock, the church at large, through the same fault, suffers both in the estimation of her own children and in the opinions of those who are without.

Duties of great importance and necessity however, are commonly duties of considerable difficulty, and that of pastoral visitation forms no exception to this rule. It may be asserted with some confidence that it is an almost instinctive feeling of the difficulty of its proper and efficient discharge, that deters some of the clergy from devoting themselves to this department of their work with the zeal which they display in others.

Its difficulty arises from a great variety of causes—but at present we will advert to two only, the first of which springs from ourselves, the other arises from those to whom we are called to minister.

As regards ourselves, we are tempted to shrink from the fulfilment of this duty by the feeling that, in prospect at least, it is for the most part very irksome, and this feeling of repugnance is of course stronger in some minds than others, in consequence of peculiarities of individual temperament.

The fastidious man feels himself repelled by coarse manners, and if his lot is cast in a town or city he will at times find it necessary to put force upon himself, before he can face the filth and squalor and degradation which not unfrequently marks the dwellings of the poor and vicious who specially need his ministrations.

The young man who happens to possess a shy or timid manner will be sensible of a great and almost painful effort before he can bring himself to call upon those to whom perhaps he is an utter stranger, and to admonish those who it may be are far his seniors in age.

The earnest hearted and devout will be tempted to despair when, on reviewing the conversation which has taken place between himself and his parishioner, he sees how then he failed in the moral courage which was necessary to make some home thrust, and here how he allowed his most direct appeal to be parried by some conventional phraseology, or some miserable common-place.

The great bulk of the clergy feel that to spend day after day in constant intercourse with those who in education, feelings and social position, are, as the great mass of their parishioners must al-

ways be, inferior in those respects to themselves; to labour in the proof of what is self-evident, often without success, to endeavour with the like result to disabuse their minds of errors, which are as preposterous as they are mischievous—to meet with indifference which we are unable to overcome—with hardness which we are powerless to soften—with ignorance increased in a triple panoply of presumption—to labour on among those with whom we seem to have nothing in common, and to labour on with little apparent result, this is no small trial to our poor feeble faith, and many who have begun this important part of their work zealously and diligently, have allowed such discouragements as have been alluded to so to cast them down that they have become weary of what appeared to them so barren of good results.

In thus briefly hinting at a few of the difficulties of this work arising from ourselves, some of those arising from our flock have been also indicated, this with yet greater brevity. They may, notwithstanding the vast variety of their aspects, be summed up in this general assertion, that there is to be observed among all classes an almost unconscious dread of our coming, as it were to too close quarters with them on those matters which influence their own spiritual state—an adroitness in turning aside the point of any observation which may seem to have any direct application to their own individual cases; and a resolution in all our intercourse with them to keep on the safe ground of the merest generalities. Before leaving this part of the subject it may, for the sake of connexion be observed, that we are ourselves almost as apt to shrink from closer and deeper communion on these points as our parishioners, and that the want of it is often as deeply felt and deplored by them as by us. As we are referring at present only to the difficulties of this portion of our office, any suggestion by which they may be overcome must be postponed.

But beside the difficulties which encompass the fulfilment of this duty, there are also great dangers against which we must ever be on our guard. Dangers of which we must all to a

greater or less degree be sensible, and which threaten both our own souls, and the souls of those committed to our care.

Every parish must have felt how much greater the difficulties are of ministering directly to the upper class of our parishioners, than to those of a more humble station, and in no department of duty are these difficulties more manifest than in parochial ministration. There is a sort of conventional restraint which embarrasses such persons when topics of a grave nature are introduced, which often leads to so great a feeling of discomfort on both sides as to prove a constant and too frequently successful temptation to slip into the common place subjects of ordinary conversation, and we leave the house with the unsatisfactory conviction that instead of having paid a visit, we have merely made "a call." It is not said that such calls are not of use, or that even if we fail in being able to turn them to better account, we should therefore neglect them—nothing should be omitted by us which may tend to cultivate a kind and friendly feeling between ourselves and all the members of our flock, and we must not consider ourselves exonerated from the obligation to attend to the proper attentions and conventionalities of society. It is merely suggested that the temptation to be *satisfied* with making mere "calls" upon the higher class of our parishioners, is a great danger to which we are exposed, and which every conscientious clergyman has felt—a danger which it requires unusual tact, earnestness, and ability altogether to avoid. To assume an unreal and professional sort of gravity—to feel ourselves bound to adopt a stiff and unnatural manner is a mistake so great as to be seldom fallen into, unless by young men who unite great conscientiousness, and a deep sense of the responsibility of their office with inexperience and ignorance of mankind—to drag in the subject of religion upon all occasions, is so offensive and indeed so irreverent that it has even been productive of more harm than good. But in avoiding one error we are bound to be very watchful against the great danger of falling into the opposite mistake; in avoiding assumed gravity

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we must in our earlier days especially be watchful against yielding to our natural levity, and in guarding against our unwise introduction of the subject of religion, we must be careful lest we fall into the equally great error of leaving it out altogether.

Every one however who feels bound to make the attempt to steer this middle course must be ready to acknowledge how much more easy it is to point the way to others than to follow it himself.

The suggestion of Professor Blunt in his very valuable book, "The Duties of the Parish Priest," that with the class of our parishioners alluded to, our conversation on ordinary occasions should be ecclesiastical rather than religious, appears the most judicious course that can be adopted, and the experience of the writer convinces him, that it is in attempting to follow out that suggestion that the best and most frequent opportunities occur for adverting briefly but naturally to those deeper and more directly spiritual topics to which we should ever be anxious to refer, remembering that the nature of the work we are called upon to do is nothing less than to "win souls to Christ."

In visiting our parishioners of the humble class we are at once set free from the difficulties which encompass our pastoral intercourse with those just alluded to, but we meet with others hardly less formidable in the danger to which they expose both the shepherd and the sheep. As this, however, is a paper read before those who having been for the most part for years in orders, and not a treatise intended for the instruction of those about to enter upon the work, there is no necessity as there is no space to enter upon any detailed description of them. It may suffice to give expression to what we all have felt that much of the unprofitableness of our religious intercourse with this portion of our flock is to be attributed to our want of some definite object in our visits. We are too apt to "drop in" upon a parishioner of this class without thinking of any special topic of religious faith or duty to be urged upon his attention, and therefore, after the ordi-

nary salutations and common places are over, we often feel somewhat at a loss how to proceed, and the feeling being common both to ourselves and the person visited, the time is apt to pass away in a sort of objectless parochial gossip very little profitable to either party.

The great necessity, the great difficulty and the great dangers of this part of our work having thus been briefly indicated, it seems better before offering any suggestions for its efficient fulfilment to draw encouragement to attempt that fulfilment from the equally brief consideration of its great rewards.

And first among them stands the great gift of inward peace. There is no duty (it may be said,) to the faithful discharge of which God so immediately and abundantly vouchsafes this blessed return. Who has not felt on setting out in the burning sun or the blinding snow for a long day's ride or drive over heavy lonely roads, the irksomeness of the duty he was about to undertake; who has not experienced the reluctance with which, at the imperious bidding of his conscience, he has closed his book or laid down his pen, to enter upon this necessary—but less congenial occupation and never ventured to repine at the burden of that necessity which was inwardly laid upon him to preach the Gospel from house to house. And who that has thus gone forth, almost sorrowing but returned again rejoicing—rejoicing, but not that he had returned, but that he had gone forth, feeling that notwithstanding all his feebleness, and mistakes, and inefficiency, yet so merciful is the Master whom he serves, that He has vouchsafed to accept his humble but honest attempts to obey His will, and has lifted up the light of his countenance upon him and given him the blessing of peace. The heart that in the morning was weighed down by the thought of the weariness of the work, is now, even amidst bodily fatigue, singing with calm and holy joy, and he lies down knowing not at which most to marvel, his own slowness and selfishness in shrinking from or hesitating in the discharge of such a duty, or the greatness of his Saviour's love and condescension in granting to so poor a

service such a rich reward.

In addition to this, however, we have another inducement to the fulfilment of this part of our work in the addition to our knowledge which we obtain from close personal intercourse with even the most unlettered of our flock—knowledge which is absolutely necessary to the efficient discharge of our duties, and which cannot be otherwise obtained. Clergymen who have been highly educated, but who from circumstances have never been thrown into intimate contact with the untaught mind, are often so manifestly wanting in this description of knowledge that it has been one means of keeping alive that most preposterous of all fallacies that ever seized upon the mind of an unreflecting mob, viz., that high intellectual culture is not necessary for the clergy. Nothing seems a more unquestionable truth than this, that those amongst us who by circumstances have been debarred from the possession of this advantage, whatever other knowledge they may possess, or however efficiently they may use it, are not equal to what they would themselves have been had they enjoyed that thorough mental training which a proper university course honestly and heartily improved is calculated to convey. But we must also remember that it is very possible indeed for one who has enjoyed all the advantages of such a course to be comparatively speaking a very inefficient clergyman for want of that knowledge which no such training can convey, and which he can obtain only through close and kindly intercourse with his people in pastoral visitation.

Such a man can form no idea of the altitude of the unlettered mind, he is, as you may learn from any sermon you may hear him preach—profoundly ignorant of their modes of thought and expression—to the old woman, who sat with open mouth drinking in his grand words and lofty thoughts with wondering admiration, you have on Monday morning to explain what was the leading idea which he had been endeavouring to enforce, for you find that she had not gained the faintest glimmer of his real meaning.

The man of God should be thoroughly furnished

for his work—he *ought* to have that intellectual training which education bestows, he *must* have that knowledge of the needs of his people's souls which intercourse with them can alone convey before he can prove himself "a workman that needeth not be ashamed." It is in the houses of his parishioners that he will gather the ideas for his most effective sermons, and it is there also that he will gradually learn the language and the illustrations in which those ideas can be most forcibly and clearly set forth. As regards our flocks, I need hardly say to this audience how undoubted are the benefits resulting to them from the wise and affectionate discharge of this part of our duty, how difficulties are explained, how misapprehensions are overcome, and how indifference to religious duties turned through God's grace into earnestness.

Neither need I enlarge upon the unequalled power which it possesses in winning for us that place in our people's hearts which rightly used is one of our most potent instrumentalities for good. On these points much might be said which cannot, however, without presumption be said to those who are now addressed, and therefore we will pass on to the consideration of some suggestions for the carrying out of this work—suggestions which have borne the test to a greater or less extent of practical experience, and which though they cannot present much of novelty to those who have been long in orders may nevertheless be possibly of some use to our less experienced brethren.

First, as regards country parishes.

One of the great difficulties with which the country clergyman has to contend, is the usually wide extent of his mission, and the thinly scattered character of the population. Great expenditure of time and labour is necessarily involved in the production of comparatively small results, for a longer period is frequently required to reach his distant parishioners, than to visit them when he has arrived at their abode—system therefore is very necessary in order to overcome this difficulty and to render this department of our work thorough and satisfactory. One of the

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first measures which the writer ventures to suggest is that as soon as the clergyman is sufficiently acquainted with the locality to which he has been appointed he should divide his mission into "routes," which from the regular manner in which our roads are laid out in the settled parts of the country is generally (though not invariably) a matter of little difficulty. These "routes," numbered or otherwise distinguished, should, in the fulfilment of our ordinary visitation, be systematically followed up, and never left unless for "sick visits," or some other equally urgent call, until every household within their limits who will accept our ministrations has been visited.

I venture to think, from some experience, and from many blunders made during its course, that to adopt some such arrangement and faithfully to adhere to it, is productive of benefits far beyond the mere systematic character which it would give to our efforts.

Every parish priest must have felt that there are certain families within his cure; who from vicious habits, indifference to religion, dislike to its ministers, or a variety of other causes he finds it extremely irksome to visit, and whom therefore he is tempted to pass over, though perhaps they more than any other require his pastoral care. Again there are families who live in some out of the way corner of the mission, far from the roads which he is accustomed to travel, and who in consequence are (without any deliberate intention,) apt to be overlooked. And once more there are parishioners who live close at hand, whose houses are just over the way—and who, because they can be visited at any time, are therefore often hardly visited at all. Now it appears to the writer that the adoption of the system of "routes," in some one of which each one of these families has its place, is the most effectual remedy against the danger of these neglects—supposing of course that each of them is conscientiously followed until every family belonging to the church and resident upon them had been visited. Beside this danger of neglect there is the almost greater danger of "favouritism." There are a few families in the parish perhaps,

who from social position, manners, and education form the naturally congenial society of the clergyman and household, and our intercourse with them *may* (within reasonable bounds) be more close and frequent than with the rest of our parishioners, without much risk of offence or jealousy on their part. But if our intimacy with them leads to manifest neglect of those in a humbler sphere, then we must be prepared for the existence, if not the display, of discontent. A more dangerous and a more frequent temptation to favouritism is met with in those families who though on a social equality with their neighbours, are their superiors in the earnestness and devoutness of their christian character, and in the hearty and understanding nature of their attachment to the Church. It is a great refreshment to the clergyman to visit such persons, and his visits are welcomed by them with great and unfeigned pleasure, but by yielding too frequently or exclusively to the gratification it affords, offence has been given to a whole neighbourhood, and the clergyman's influence seriously crippled. Now the adoption and faithful carrying out of the system of "routes" will tend to guard us against the evil of "favouritism" on the one hand as effectually as against the evil of neglect on the other, yet it will prove sufficiently elastic to allow us to pay a somewhat larger measure of attention to the more earnest and prominent members of our flock; while it will keep us from the sin and danger of altogether overlooking those who are remote in position, humble in station, or cold and indifferent in religion.

Supposing, however, that we have resolved to adopt some such system as the one suggested, the thoughtful and conscientious clergyman will ask himself how he is to render these systematic and periodical visits most profitable to those committed to his care.

In an earlier part of this paper, when adverting to the difficulties of this work, the unprofitableness of yielding to an objectless parochial gossip was mentioned as one with which we should meet especially when our visits become frequently repeated. In avoiding this temptation by the

introduction of directly religious topics, we shall find, without some previous care, that we shall be prone almost unconsciously to recur to the same subjects again and again, and then run the risk of rendering our visits tedious and unacceptable. To escape this error, some clergymen confine their conversation over-much (the writer humbly ventures to think) to merely secular subjects—the weather, the crops, and the markets must more or less come up among an agricultural people, but if we would be faithful in our work, they must soon be left for higher topics, or made subservient to their inculcation to do so naturally and without constraint, is a talent well worthy of thought and cultivation on the part of every clergyman who desires through divine grace to become “an able minister of the New Testament.”

One means of avoiding these difficulties which the experience of the writer leads him respectfully to suggest to his brethren is the desirability of the priest before setting out on the ordinary visitation of the parish, to select some one subject, and resolve that unless deterred by some special reason, he will draw the conversation towards that particular doctrine or duty in every house which he enters, adapting his application of it, as far as his tact and judgment aids him, to the different character and circumstances of the several families.

On one round of visitation, the subject of private prayer may be the topic chosen. On the next round, the duty of family prayer may be enforced. Public worship, the Holy Communion, the duty of joining in the singing, or in the responses; the responsibilities of parents; truthfulness; honesty; almsgiving; in fact the whole round of the faith and practice may by degrees be presented in this way to our flocks in their more simple and practical aspects. The adoption of some such plan gives a point and profit to our visits which they can never possess, if paid without plan or object. A single word entered in our parish note book will guard us against a too speedy repetition of the same subject in the same “route,” and the wide scope supplied by all these subjects affords the means

of bringing them home with greater or less distinctness in the way of warning, exhortation, or encouragement to the various classes with whom we may come in contact.

It will have been observed that hitherto the writer has spoken of ordinary visitation only, by which, of course, is meant those regular periodical visits which are called for by no special circumstances, beyond the earnest desire of the diligent parish priest to discharge his duty, and to benefit his flock. The regularity of this work will, however, be frequently interrupted by the necessity of paying visits of a special character, arising from the occurrence in the parish of sickness or affliction, and more commonly still by the oft-recurring absence of some of the congregation from public worship, and some of the communicants from the Holy Eucharist. The visitation of the sick is a subject which ought not to be omitted in such a paper as the present, and if time will permit, the writer hopes before concluding to make some remarks upon this most difficult but imperative duty. In the meantime, he would draw your attention to a plan which though possessing nothing very novel or brilliant has nevertheless been found in the experience of the writer very useful in a small community in bringing pastoral influence to bear on those who were irregular in attendance at church or unfrequent in their approach to the table of the Lord.

We must all have felt how easy it is, even in small congregations, to overlook the absence of some of our ordinary worshippers. We at last detect the fact that his place is vacant, or it is, perhaps, mentioned to us, and then it strikes us that it has been so for a considerable time, and we wonder that we did not observe it before. We resolve that we will go and see him without delay; but some urgent duty on the Monday detains us from our purpose, and then perhaps it escapes our recollection, and in this way weeks will sometimes go by before we fulfil our purpose, and that without intentional neglect on our part.

Now, it is to guard against this, that in small fixed congregations the plan alluded to is recom-

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mended—it simply consists in having a small book in which are entered the names of the various occupants of the pews or benches in the church or churches wherein we minister, and opposite the names a column (or where there is a double service, two columns) for each Sunday. In running the eye down the list of names it is astonishing how accurately, at all events after a little practice, we can decide upon the presence or absence of its owner. A mark set down in the column shows that the person opposite whose name it stands was at church—the want of that mark proclaims to our eye the fact of his absence. Our Sunday evening's work should be the filling up of this book, and making the list in our note book of the absentees; and in a village charge it has a most powerful influence, if, during the week, we can manage to call upon them. This, however, in an extended rural parish, where a clergyman has two or three stations to serve on the same day, would be impossible; but the adoption of the plan is highly beneficial even then, for though it would manifestly be far beyond our power to make a special visit on the occurrence of every casual absence, yet our church attendance book, if carefully kept, (and to do so involves very little trouble,) would prevent us from overlooking cases of very frequent irregularity, or of continued absence, and make our people feel that their neglect in this particular would be sure to bring us to their houses, and be made the subject of kindly but uncomfortable remonstrances.

Another list in the same book, consisting of the names of the communicants, with a column headed with the date of each celebration of the Holy Communion, and treated in the same way, would be found of the greatest service both to pastor and people, and when the average number of communicants vary from ten to thirty, there can be no possible difficulty in keeping such a record.

There is one more suggestion which, with all deference, I would submit to the consideration of my brethren engaged in the rural districts.

A young clergyman generally and very naturally endeavours to bring his influence to bear upon the

heads of the families committed to his care. He feels less difficulty with the seniors of the flock than with the young people. He is too much on a level with them in point of years to be able to treat them in a paternal way, and his dread of their regarding the subject of religion as at all events without interest, if not absolutely a bore, renders him anxious to hold communion chiefly with those who readily recognise his office, and acknowledge the importance of his work.

As a matter of fact, however, the elder members of our flock are usually those who are most difficult to direct. Their religious views, if they ever have any, are usually fixed, and have become part of themselves—their prejudices are often absolutely inveterate—their standard of perfection is usually the practice of some clergyman whom they knew in their youth, and whether that practice was right or wrong, to vary from it lays him who does so open to disapproval or perhaps opposition. The children and youth of the parish are those, to the instruction and improvement of whom he should chiefly direct his efforts. In a strictly rural mission, however, the great difficulty is to attain this object. Sunday is a day so fully occupied in the celebration of the public services at two or three churches, many miles distant from each other, that the country clergyman can do little or nothing in the work of the Sunday School. He finds it impossible to get teachers. If he succeeds in doing so, they are often the very embodiment of incompetency; and even when they are zealous and efficient, it is only the children who are within a reasonable distance from the church who are able to attend. A large proportion, therefore, of the children of the mission must, even under the most favourable circumstances, grow up with very little religious intercourse with their pastor, and consequently, as a general rule, with little intelligent grounding in their faith and duty as christians and churchmen.

Now, an adaptation of the system of parochial visitation might be turned into a remedy for this state of things, and though the idea about to be named did not suggest itself to the writer until

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nearly the close of his connexion with a rural parish, yet a somewhat extensive subsequent experience among the young, convinces him of its perfect practicability, and of the very great benefits both to old and young, which might reasonably be expected from it. Certain localities in the mission where several church families reside, should be fixed upon, and the clergyman should appoint a certain day after school hours, when he would visit the particular house, in that locality, which was most centrally or conveniently situated, the object of the visit should be for the express purpose of instructing and catechising the children of that family. The children of the neighbours should be requested to attend, and the elder members of the several households should be invited to be present, if agreeable to themselves. A reasonably good catechist, who sought to cultivate with the young a genial and somewhat vivacious manner, and who (by previous preparation) proved himself clear in statements, and fertile in illustration, would not want catechumens among the young, or auditors among the old. One such gathering would do more good than half a dozen sermons. The power which would thus be obtained over the young, would be greater than can be easily expressed; the interest of parents in the instruction of their children, would lead them heartily to support such endeavours for their good, while they would themselves gain many a lesson which it would otherwise be impossible to convey.

Having thus brought before you such suggestions as from experience and observation appear to the writer most important in carrying out the work of parochial visitation in country missions, let us now turn our attention to some considerations connected with the same work in large towns or cities.

The general feeling on the part of the country clergy is, if I may judge of them by my own, that a town charge affords scope for much more satisfactory labour, in consequence of the greater accessibility of the people, their proximity to the church, and, generally speaking, their greater intelligence. No one of course denies that in

towns we do enjoy these advantages, but there are a variety of obstacles to be met with in a dense population which far more than counterbalance them. Indeed, the difficulties of regular, systematic, satisfactory pastoral work in a large town parish are, as we are at present situated, overwhelmingly great, and in endeavouring to reduce one's ideas to order, a feeling of bewilderment is experienced; and now after a period of nearly twenty years passed in parochial work, and spent in nearly equal proportions between the country and the town, the writer has little hesitation in asserting that though the city is the more important, the country is, on the whole, the most satisfactory sphere of work.

The difficulty of town work arises, first, from the great mass of persons to be attended to, and secondly, from the multiplicity of occasional duty, arising from this dense population and necessarily interrupting the work of parochial visiting; and thirdly, from the insignificant number of the clergy, as compared with the large masses to whom they are called to minister. The time required by the clergyman in town for preparing for his public duties is usually greater than that demanded of his rural brother, inasmuch as services in the same church and congregation are more frequent. When, amidst bewildering hurry, he has prepared for sermons, lectures, catechizings, and bible classes, he will find his time eaten up by numberless, yet unavoidable occasional duties. The poor will devour his mornings, and the investigation and relief of their distress does much, at least in winter, to consume his afternoons. The sick, of which he is sure to have a permanent list, must be visited; the dead must be interred—a duty that involves a great expenditure of time. He is also sure to be placed upon various committees, whose meetings being almost invariably fixed for the afternoon, which is his most valuable time for regular pastoral work, seriously interferes with its efficient discharge. With all these draw-backs, it is no marvel that parochial visitation in towns, with the great number of people, and the small number of clergy, should be very inadequately carried out, and

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no one who has had any practical experience in such a sphere of duty can wonder that complaints of parochial neglect should be loud and frequent on the part of those who never, perhaps, reflect upon the countless calls upon a clergyman's time and energies.

Evans, in his valuable work on "The Bishopric of Souls," sets down eight as the average number of parochial visits which a clergyman, in a good sized parish in England, should pay daily. This is a high average even in such circumstances, to be maintained steadily throughout the year. Experience convinces the present writer that five visits daily is as high an average as even a very diligent priest can maintain, after the fulfilment of the multifarious other duties which in a city are forced upon him. As Saturday must generally be regarded as a *dies non*, as far as visiting is concerned, (unless it be to the upper class of his parishioners,) he has but five days in the week for the prosecution of this work, and if, with the other calls upon his time, he can maintain the rate of five visits a day, or one thousand two hundred and fifty in the course of the year, he cannot fairly accuse himself of idleness. The writer has kept up the average to eight, or two thousand in twelve months, but it was, when being little known, the calls for the discharge of occasional duty were comparatively few.

The question presents itself, how in the dense population of a city shall the system of visitation be carried on, so as to be most efficient? It is a question which is not easy to answer, if we regard ourselves as responsible for all who, in a certain locality, would be willing to accept our ministrations, which is certainly the theory of the church. There are two circumstances, however, which in this country tend to obscure this theory, and to turn the clergy into the chaplains of the few, and not the spiritual pastors of many. These are, first, the want of properly constituted parishes with clearly defined territorial limits; second, the prevalence of the pew system. The operation of these two facts is very injurious both upon priests and people. The first leaves the clergyman without any knowledge of where his work commences,

or where it ends. He is sent forth with the most awful responsibility resting upon him, responsibility for the welfare of immortal souls, but he is not told who those are for whom he has to answer. With the burden of this indefinite charge resting upon him, and after suffering from the bewildering hopelessness of being able to fulfil it, the second fact, namely, the pew system comes in, and presents an almost irresistible temptation to sink from the high character of the shepherd of a definite, but often wandering and wayward flock, into the chosen chaplain of those comparatively few who, perhaps, least need his care; hence, clergymen may be heard to declare that as no limits are assigned them, they hold themselves responsible for only those who attend their church, and that they recognise no claim of right on the part of any others, either to temporal relief or spiritual ministration, i. e., they become chaplains of those who, having some earnestness about their souls, choose, of their own mere notion, to place themselves under his pastoral care, by renting or occupying sittings in the church which he is appointed to serve.

The temptation to act in this way arising from our present want of ecclesiastical order is extremely great, but it is a course of action very different from the vow of our ordination, "that we would seek Christ's sheep, which are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever."

Such, however, being the state of things existing in our principal towns and cities, we had better enquire how we may best fulfil the important part of our work, under the difficulties alluded to.

Our communicants or pew-holders—or where there are no pews, the regular worshippers in the church which we serve, have unquestionably the first claim upon our pastoral attention. Where a church is pewed, the clergyman having only to apply to his churchwardens for an absolutely correct list of the names and residences of the holders thereof, can have no excuse for omitting to visit them, and in carrying out that visitation,

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he might easily proceed upon those general principles which have been adverted to as necessary for the efficient discharge of this duty in village or rural parishes.

In a large church which is absolutely free, the difficulty of this department of pastoral work is immensely increased by the extreme, and often insuperable difficulty of learning the names and residences of the worshippers. If a clergyman assumes a district of the town as that which naturally pertains to his church, and confines himself thereto, he leaves unvisited, it may be, the larger part of his congregation, who, perhaps, reside beyond the limits to which he directs his efforts, while they are not visited by the clergyman within whose bounds—or rather supposed bounds—they live, because they are not pew-holders or attendants at his church; and the result is, that smarting under the idea of neglect, they often become alienated from the church, and unite themselves with some dissenting body.

On the other hand, however, if he devotes himself to the very arduous task of endeavouring to discover and visit those who actually form his congregation, he will find it necessary to traverse the whole city, and will often spend so much time in looking for those whom he does not know, that he must neglect those with whom he is acquainted, and this, from want of thought or knowledge of the multiplicity of his engagements, will often prove a cause of offence to such persons.

The order, then, in which (it appears to the writer) we should devote ourselves to this part of our work, is the following:—

1st. To the sick, some of whom in a large town will always be upon our list.

2nd. To the poor, the urgency of whose sufferings, especially in the winter, often brook no delay, and the danger of being deceived by whom is so great as to demand personal investigation.

3rd. To the communicants, especially those of the humbler class who have recently been confirmed. This is a kind of parochial visiting which, carried on in a kindly, earnest spirit, is often followed by great rewards.

4th. The general worshippers (pew-holders or

attendants) at the church in which we minister.

Any one able to reflect must know that when one clergyman (or even two in a populous parish) has attended to these various classes, he can have but little time to give to another and most important class, of responsibility for whom no earnest-hearted parish priest, who seeks to realize the value of the souls for which Christ died, can wholly divest his mind, however occupied he may be. I mean

5th. The great mass of careless, worldly, ignorant, Godless, and vicious people, who throng on every side, and who, though christians in name, privilege, and responsibility, are heathens, and often worse in life and practice.

Now, according to the theory of our church, these are part of our flock, and a part of it requiring very earnest, wise, and loving labour, and yet how miserable are the attempts which, with our countless engagements, and insignificant numbers, we are able to make on their behalf. These are Christ's sheep, which through their own waywardness indeed are dispersed abroad; these are his children, deeply erring and disobedient it is true, but still his children, who are in the midst of this naughty world, and whom, with his own commission, He hath sent us forth to seek, that, being saved through Him, they may not, by reason of their sin, perish under a deeper condemnation than the heathen can ever know.

What then, in the way of pastoral visitation, can be done on their behalf?

There are many of course who utterly refuse our ministrations, in consequence of schism.

They place themselves beyond our reach by declaring themselves attached to various dissenting bodies, and christians. They not unfrequently avoid good influence from every quarter, by asserting to the denominational minister that they are strong churchmen, while they declare to the clergyman that they belong to "the meeting;" many among them, however, profess to belong to the church, but as they habitually abstain from all religious worship, there is no way to discover them but by regular domiciliary visitation, begun at one end of every street, and

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carried on faithfully and impartially to the other.
 Now, after years of effort in this special work, and
 thousands upon thousands of applications made
 at the doors of the houses in the neighbourhood
 wherein he ministers, the writer has been brought
 to the conclusion, that without a large increase
 in the staff of clergy, it is a work that cannot
 adequately be carried out by the parish priest—
 in fact it is not the work of the priest at
 all, but that of the deacon. In the practical
 abeyance of that office in the church, the system
 of lay co-operation, known by the name of
 district visiting, has been resorted to, often with
 good effect. We cannot, however, expect a
 human device, however excellent, to produce
 results which would flow from a divine institution,
 and therefore, while district visiting is under
 proper direction, most useful and desirable, we
 need something more regular and systematic, and
 more immediately under the controlling hand of
 the clergyman.

In view of the difficulties which appear to sur-
 round the question of the restoration of the
 diaconite, the writer has been convinced that
 measures involving little outlay might be adopted
 in town parishes, which would secure us many of
 the advantages which would arise from the
 restoration of the order named, and which advan-
 tages we could secure at once, without waiting
 for the settlement of the vexed question alluded to.

In carrying on parochial work with the assist-
 ance of others a cleric should be recognised as
 such, and a laic should remain distinctly a laic.
 The confusion in the popular mind on the nature
 of the distinction between them is already suffi-
 ciently great without our doing ought to render
 it greater. The writer, therefore, is conscien-
 tiously opposed to all such names and offices as
 lay missionaries or scripture readers. He thinks,
 however, that a lay assistant as such might be
 employed in every town parish with the most
 beneficial effect.

If the territorial limits of each parish were
 defined, a young man of respectability and intelli-
 gence might be engaged for some sixty pounds
 per annum, whose ostensible character should be

that of a parochial church book agent, as beside the good arising from the work suggested by the name of his office, it would afford a sufficient and acceptable reason for his visits to the parishioners without the appearance of unauthorised intrusion. He should endeavour to sell at fair prices Bibles, prayer books, and sound publications of a religious character; and such profit as should accrue from the sale, should be his own perquisite.

His field of operations should of course, be the parish with which he is connected. He should leave no street, court, or lane, until it had been thoroughly visited, and a record made of all the inhabitants, with such particulars as he could gather regarding their religious opinions, characters, and circumstances.

It should be his duty to afford every information to the families visited, concerning the parish church, the hours of services, Sunday and day schools, the names and residence of the clergy, with their willingness to minister to any one needing their services, and in cases of poverty, sickness, or affliction, to report them to the parish priest without delay.

He should be expected to be present in the Sunday School, provided with a complete register of all the children, with their names, ages, and places of abode. A list of those absent should be made by him, and his invariable work on Monday (and if necessary on Tuesday) should be to visit the parents of those children, ascertain the cause of absence, and exhort them to regularity.

In cases where books or tracts were not likely to be purchased, he might be furnished with some of the latter for distribution.

On Saturday, a day when all visitation of the poor should be abstained from, his duty should be to enter fairly in books, to be kept for that purpose, a report of the week's work. These books should be indexed, one for the names of the families, the other with the names of the streets, and each name should be entered in both books.

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round the parish, the clergyman would obtain a hold upon it which could not otherwise be obtained, a large amount of valuable time would be saved, and his pastoral visits would be directed to those quarters where they were most likely to be efficient.

The remarks and suggestions which have now been made on this very important subject, have, notwithstanding all attempts at brevity, extended far beyond what the writer originally anticipated or intended. He must, therefore, relinquish the purpose previously expressed, of adverting to that difficult department of pastoral ministration—the visiting of the sick—a duty of imperious obligation, to treat of which with point and clearness, and yet more to discharge which with proper effect, demands a wisdom, tenderness, skill, and devotion, to which the writer is not presumptuous enough to lay claim.

As regards that part of our office which has been treated of, it is impossible (if the writer may judge by his own experience) to be too careful of the spirit in which it is fulfilled; there is a strong tendency to allow it to sink down to the level of a duty which we dare not neglect, but which we reluctantly perform, instead of regarding it as a labour of love to be gladly undertaken out of regard to the souls for whom Christ died.

Not to be weary in well-doing, is a scriptural precept which very strongly applies to this department of our work, and the only way to avoid such weariness to which our poor, weak, worldly hearts are so prone, is to maintain, by all proper means, a deep and lively sense of the priceless value of the souls committed to our care, and of the weight of responsibility devolving upon us.

There are two or three methods which, in the judgment of the writer, should tend to produce these results.

The first is the frequent study, after the Holy Scriptures, of good, earnest-toned books on the duties of the ministerial office. Among the many difficulties and discouragements with which we are encompassed, it is one of the most hopeful signs of the times that so many of such books

should be written, and that they should be so eagerly read.

Brydge's, though somewhat out of date, and very distinctly belonging to the lower school of theology, contains, especially in the earlier portion, much that is useful. Evans' Bishopric of Souls is invaluable. Munro on Parochial Works, though mostly adapted to England, has much that is excellent; his sermons on the responsibilities of the ministerial office are very searching and awakening. Blunt's Duties of the Parish Priest; Hegatis' Ember Hours; and last, and perhaps best of all, the Bishop of Oxford's ordination addresses, are books that we should often read, and being so read, they could hardly fail to rouse us to that diligence and labour that becomes our office.

Secondly—There is great need that we should be more devout in our supplications to Him who is the Great Shepherd and Bishop of all our souls, that he would grant unto us such measures of His own Spirit, as will make us able ministers of the New Testament, for who, in the painful conviction of his own weakness and unworthiness, has not felt that it must be a power that is more than human, that can enable us to fulfil so weighty a work as that to which we are called.

The love of Christ must constrain us to love and labour for those whom He has redeemed, or else our work will grow cold and formal, but that love can only be made to glow with a calm and steady radiance by the breath of the Divine Spirit shed upon our hearts in answer to our earnest supplications.

We are full of weakness however, we know what is right but we often fail in its performance, we want help in almost every thing, and in nothing more than in our prayers for our people. Evan's in his Bishopric of Souls tells us that the parish priest comes in from his clergy's work, with his heart and mind full of the needs and dangers of his flock, and falling down before God pours forth in unpremeditated words his earnest intercessions on their behalf. He asserts that forms of prayer are insufficient for such moments and serve to hamper rather than to help us. Doubtless there are such moments, and he can be

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little in earnest in his awful work who has not experienced them; but at all events for us feebler and less ardent souls—these moments are the exception and not the rule, and wearied and jaded with long continued labour, we often need the help that earnest and holy forms provide; of this kind of help however the clergy have comparatively little. Hele's Offices are more valuable for their admirable arrangement of scripture bearing upon our duties than for the forms of prayer which they provide. In Bishop Armstrong's beautiful little manual however, called "The Pastor in his Closet," we have an aid to our devotion which no clergyman should be without. If those beautiful prayers could be slightly re-cast, and if evening devotions could be added to them breathing the same spirit of devout humility and loving tender care for the immortal well-being of Christ's Church and people, and the same anxious desire for grace to enable us to fulfil our duties toward them it would be a gift for which no parish priest could be too thankful.

Lastly, to keep us alive to the greatness of our work and to obtain the grace which is necessary to do it, we need, as has been well said, "a broader and deeper stream of prayer than can flow from our own souls." We very urgently need the prayers of our people—but this blessing which they have it in their power to confer upon us, we receive, it is to be feared, but sparingly. This sad truth that our people are more disposed to criticise than to pray for us, may in some degree be attributed to the too general neglect of the Ember seasons, and it has often seemed to the writer, that if some special forms of prayer were distributed among our people and earnest exhortations to use them on our behalf during these seasons, were addressed to them, that many of the more devout and stable souls might be led to perform this duty on our behalf who now from mere forgetfulness neglect it.

If moreover, in these days when special and additional services are being suggested, the Bishop with the sanction of the Synod would frame a form of prayer for those times, having as

those about to be ordained, a point and force
would be given to them that would tend much to
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